

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0695891

FOR NPS USE ONLY

JAN 29 1979

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Buckstaff Observatory

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

2119 North Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Oshkosh

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

sixth

STATE

Wisconsin

CODE

55

COUNTY

Winnebago

CODE

139

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☒ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☒ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Board of Regents

STREET &amp; NUMBER

University of Wisconsin -- Oshkosh

CITY, TOWN

Oshkosh

VICINITY OF

STATE

Wisconsin 54901

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Winnebago County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Oshkosh

STATE

Wisconsin 54901

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

1978

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

CITY, TOWN

Madison

STATE

Wisconsin 53706

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT

☐ GOOD

☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED

☐ RUINS

☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED

☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE  
(see enclosed site plan)

The Buckstaff Observatory is an interconnected group of structures, the major components of which were built about 1924, and which has been added to and improved a number of times since then. The main building, the Buckstaffs' residence, is a story-and-a-half grey clapboarded frame cottage with a Dutch-style gambrel roof. Large shed dormers, open eaves, and the massing of the building give it a bungaloid appearance which is characteristic of many small residences built in the 1920s. Wings have been added to this basic structure on all sides. All are utilitarian in nature but are sympathetic with the basic design of the house. The complex appears to have been completed before the Second World War; its interior was remodeled in 1951.<sup>1</sup>

Connected to the main building by a sixty-foot-long hallway, which contains part of the Buckstaffs' extensive library, is a dumbbell-shaped structure consisting of two observatory domes connected by a long narrow exhibit room. The westernmost dome contains a sixteen-inch telescope, and the easternmost contains a five-inch telescope designed for solar observation. Detached and to the south of the solar dome is the simple dome structure constructed in 1918. It has been modified and contains a three-inch telescope. Scattered around the grounds of the observatory are a variety of meteorological instruments.

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<sup>1</sup> Research has thus far been unable precisely to document additions and modifications with the exception of the 1951 remodeling.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		association with im- portant individual	

SPECIFIC DATES 1924

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Buckstaff Observatory is significant to the history of scientific inquiry in the Oshkosh area. Since 1924 it has served as an important astronomical and meteorological data collection center. It has also served an important educational function in Oshkosh as an informal astronomical and meteorological laboratory for the Oshkosh State Normal School, and its successors, the Wisconsin State University -- Oshkosh and the University of Wisconsin -- Oshkosh. It is also significant for its association with Ralph N. Buckstaff.

Ralph N. Buckstaff is a prominent retired Oshkosh industrialist who headed a family furniture and cabinet-making business which had developed from the lumber business his grandfather had founded in 1867. In 1918 Ralph Buckstaff began the observatory at North Main Street, installing a home-made eight-inch reflecting telescope in a simple observatory structure which still is in use at the site. Buckstaff, who previously had had no formal training in astronomy or meteorology, began astronomical observation as a hobby in 1910 when he acquired a three-inch reflecting telescope with which to observe Halley's Comet. In 1924 Buckstaff established a substantial residence and observatory at North Main Street and that year he added formal meteorological observation and recording to his avocation of astronomy.

Although Buckstaff remained a successful Oshkosh businessman, astronomy and meteorology became his real callings, and he is most noted for his activities in connection with the observatory and with the furthering of science in Oshkosh. He helped found the Oshkosh Public Museum and was a long-time president of its board of directors; he was also its curator of natural history. In addition he was an active member of a variety of astronomical societies as well as of the Winnebago County Historical and Archeological Society.

In following years Buckstaff expanded the observatory complex to include three telescopes and domes, and the observatory gained renown as a local center for scientific investigation of the heavens as well as of the earth's atmosphere. In the 1920s Buckstaff began lecturing part time at the Oshkosh Normal School, and his students began visiting the observatory and using it as a laboratory. It continues in that function to the present. When Buckstaff observed what was believed to be a snowstorm on Mars in the late 1920s, the story gained statewide media coverage. In 1958 he was credited with the discovery of a previously unknown variable star, Yi 1256. In addition, Buckstaff is noted for his extensive study of sunspots. For some time, the Buckstaff Observatory has been considered to be among the best amateur astronomical observatories in the midwest.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Appleton Post-Crescent, 24 Apr. 1954, 3 Feb. 1963, 24 Jul. 1963, 3 Mar. 1968, 22 Sept. 1968, 6 Jun. 1971, 2 Jul. 1978.  
Buckstaff, Mrs. Ralph N. interview and personal scrapbook, 1978.  
Midwest Museums Conference of the American Association of Museums. XXXV:4, Fall 1975.  
Milwaukee Journal, 23 May 1926, 24 Mar. 1935, 8 Mar. 1947, 11 Mar. 1947, 16 Feb. 1956.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.27 a. \_\_\_\_\_

QUADRANGLE NAME Oshkosh, Wisconsin

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 376 760 48 77 680

B                  

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C                  

D                  

E                  

F                  

G                  

H                  

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property is a rectangular lot with the northeast corner at the intersection of Main Street and Allen Avenue, extending west parallel to Allen Avenue 370 feet and south parallel to Main Street 150 feet.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

David A. Donath, Historian

ORGANIZATION

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

STREET & NUMBER

816 State Street

CITY OR TOWN

Madison

DATE

October 1978

TELEPHONE

608/262-3390

STATE

Wisconsin 53706

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Richard K. Kneary*

TITLE Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

1/23/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

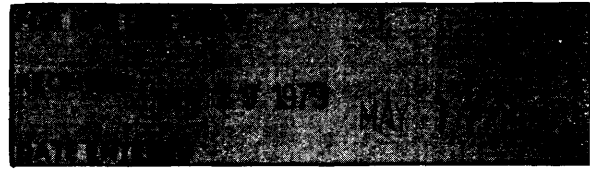
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 5.17.79

DATE 5.17.79

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**



CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8, 9, 1 PAGE 1

8 SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

The role of the observatory as a meteorological observation station is perhaps even more important. Since 1924 the Buckstaff Observatory, a Cooperative Weather Observer for the U.S. Weather Service, systematically has recorded meteorological data on the Oshkosh area. Although failing health prevents Ralph Buckstaff from actively continuing his observations, his wife and the observatory caretaker have continued this data collection to the present.

Although the Buckstaffs have deeded the observatory to the University of Wisconsin -- Oshkosh, they continue to reside there. The observatory is used by the Department of Physics as an astronomical observatory and periodically is opened to the public for informal stargazing as well as educational purposes. It remains a lively scientific and cultural resource in Oshkosh.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (continued)

Milwaukee Sentinel, 20 Jan. 1952.

Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, 14 Jun. 1918, 6 Dec. 1951, 28 May 1955, 24 Jun. 1958, 6 Feb. 1960, 25 Feb. 1961, 25 May 1963, 14 Aug. 1964, 15 Sept. 1964, 24 Oct. 1964, 31 Oct. 1964, 22 Nov. 1969.

Payne, Dr. George. interview, 1978.

Simpson, Helen. interview, 1978.

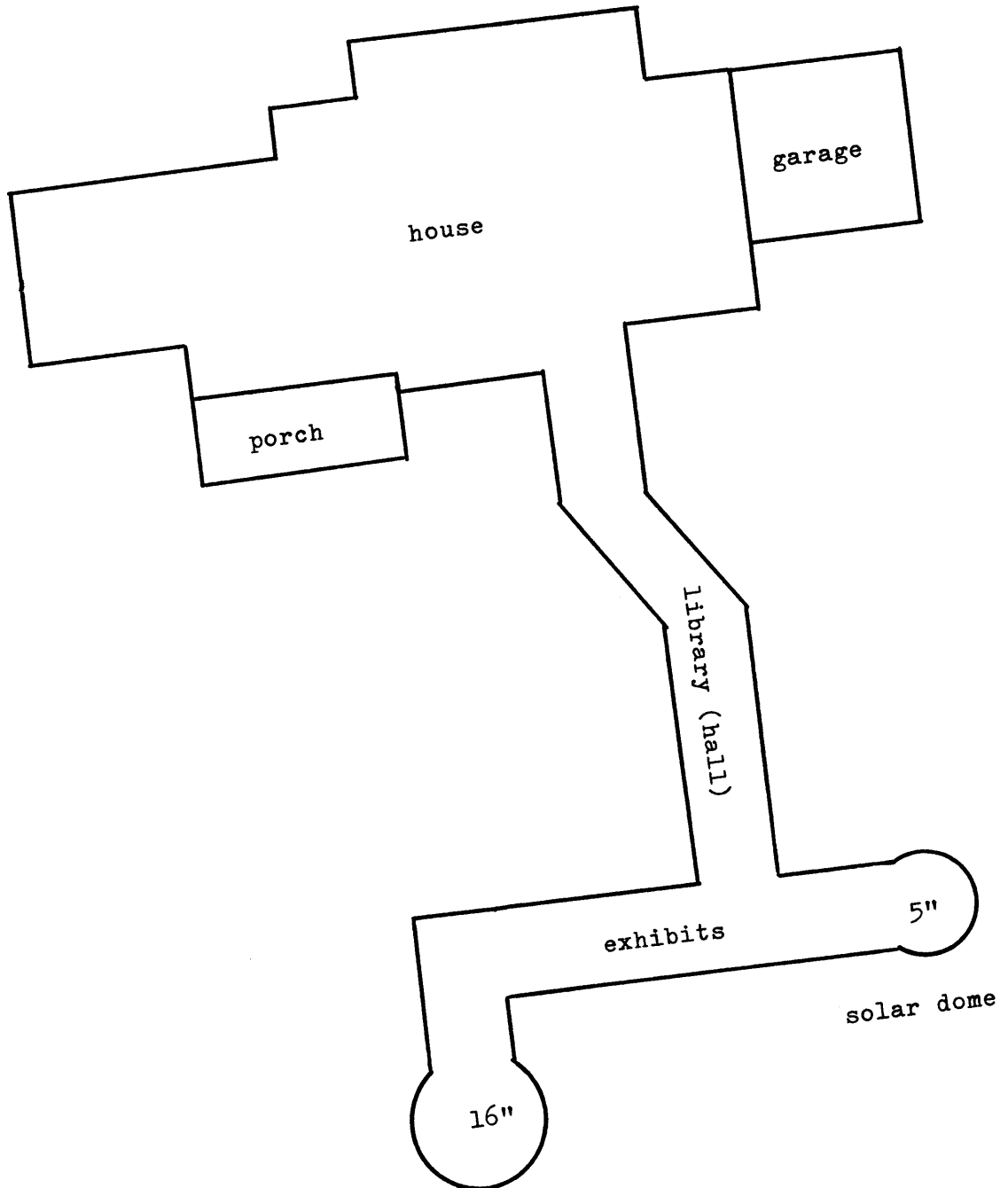
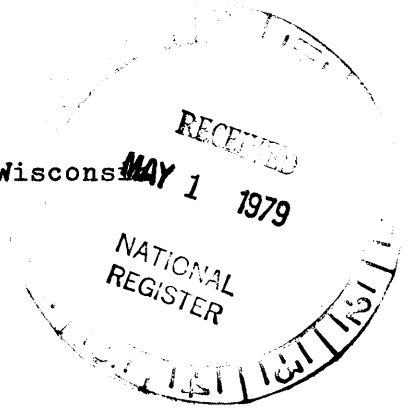
Titus, William Albert. History of the Fox River Valley, Lake Winnebago and the Green Bay Area. Chicago, 1930.

11 FORM PREPARED BY (continued)

Wesley A. Hoaglund, Assistant Planner  
City of Oshkosh August 7, 1978  
215 Church Avenue 414/424-0302  
Oshkosh Wisconsin 54901



BUCKSTAFF OBSERVATORY, Oshkosh, Wisconsin  
approximate site plan



scale- roughly 1:240

